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United States  
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Agriculture

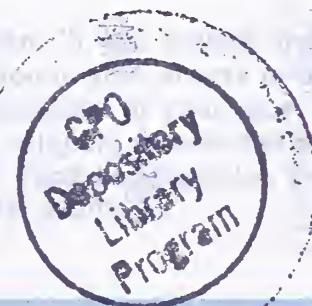
Food and  
Nutrition  
Service

Program Aid  
Number 1340

# Facts About the Food Stamp Program

FOOD COUPONS

This is an equal opportunity program.  
Discrimination in your efforts to participate  
in the Food Stamp Program because of your race, color,  
national origin, age, sex, handicap, religion, or political beliefs,  
write immediately to: Administrator, Food and Nutrition Service,  
3101 Park Center Dr., Alexandria, Va. 22302.



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U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE  
**FOOD COUPONS**

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This is an equal opportunity program. If you believe you have been discriminated against by the Food Stamp Program because of age, sex, color, race, disability, religious creed, national origin or political beliefs, write immediately to the Administrator, Food and Nutrition Service, 3101 Park Center Drive, Alexandria, Virginia 22302.

# Facts About the Food Stamp Program

The Food Stamp Program helps low-income people buy the food they need for good health. You may be able to get food stamps if you:

- work for low wages,
- are unemployed or work part time,
- receive welfare or other assistance payments,
- are elderly or disabled and live on a small income, or
- are homeless.

State public assistance agencies run the program through their local offices. The basic rules are the same everywhere.

The amount of food stamps you can get is based on the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Thrifty Food Plan, which is an estimate of how much it costs to give your household nutritious, low-cost meals. This estimate is changed every year to keep pace with food prices.

In the Food Stamp Program, a household is a group of people who live together and buy food and prepare meals together for all people in the group. If your household passes the program's eligibility tests, the amount of food stamps you get will depend on the number of people in your household and on how much monthly income is left after certain amounts (deductions) are subtracted.

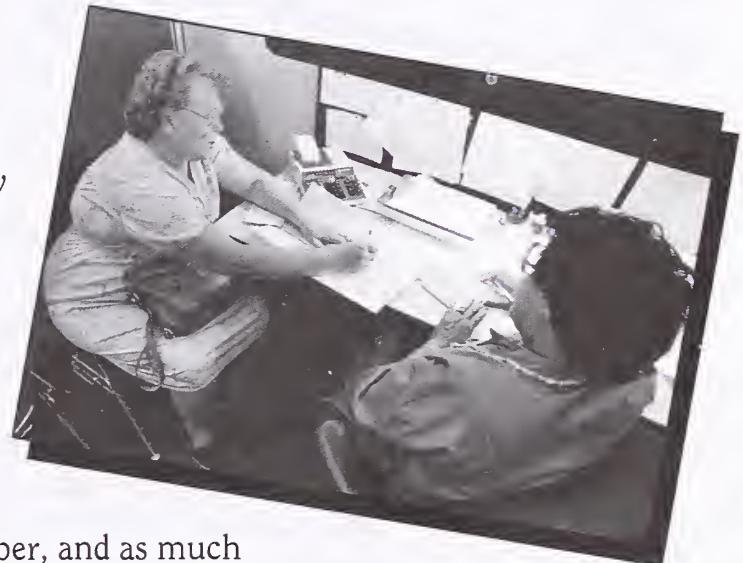
For most households, food stamps are only part of their food budgets; they must spend some of their own cash along with their food stamps in order to buy enough food for a month.

For more information, contact your local food stamp office. It is probably listed under "Social Services Department" or "Food Stamps" in the State or local government pages of the telephone directory.

## Applying for Food Stamps

The food stamp office will give you an application form on the same day you ask for one. You may ask for it in person, over the phone, or by mail; or someone else may get one for you.

The office will accept the form on the same day you turn it in, even if they cannot interview you on that day.



Fill in your name, address, telephone number, and as much other information as you can on the form, and sign it. Give or send the form to the office as soon as possible. A food stamp worker can help you fill out the rest of the form during your interview.

**YOU MUST ANSWER ALL QUESTIONS COMPLETELY AND HONESTLY.  
IF YOU FAIL TO DO SO, YOU CAN BE REMOVED FROM THE PROGRAM,  
FINED, PUT IN PRISON, OR ALL THREE.**

If you qualify for food stamps, you will get them no later than 30 days from the date the office got your application.

If your household has little or no money and needs help right away, let the food stamp office know—you may be able to get food stamps within 5 days. Fill in all of the first page of the application so a worker can see if you qualify for faster service.

If you are applying for public assistance such as Aid to Families with Dependent

Children (AFDC), you may apply for food stamps at the same time in the welfare office.

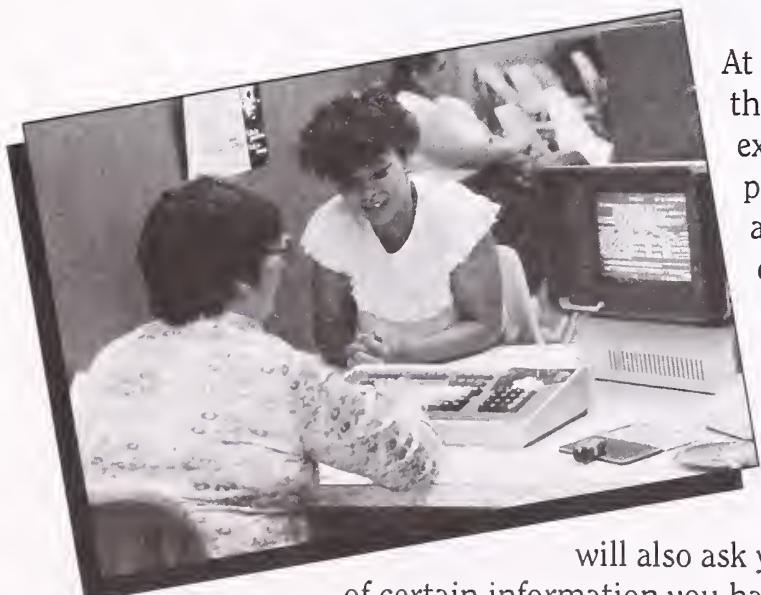
If you and everyone you live with are applying for or getting Supplemental Security Income (SSI) benefits, you may apply for food stamps in your Social Security district office, except in "SSI cash-out" States (where people who receive SSI benefits get cash instead of food stamps).

In some locations, households that are applying for general assistance (State or local welfare programs) can apply for food stamps at the same time.

Other households must apply for food stamps through their local food stamp office.

## Having an Interview With a Food Stamp Worker

After you have turned in your application, a worker will hold a private interview with you or another member of your household.



At the interview, the worker will explain the program rules and help you complete any parts of the application that you have not filled out.

The worker

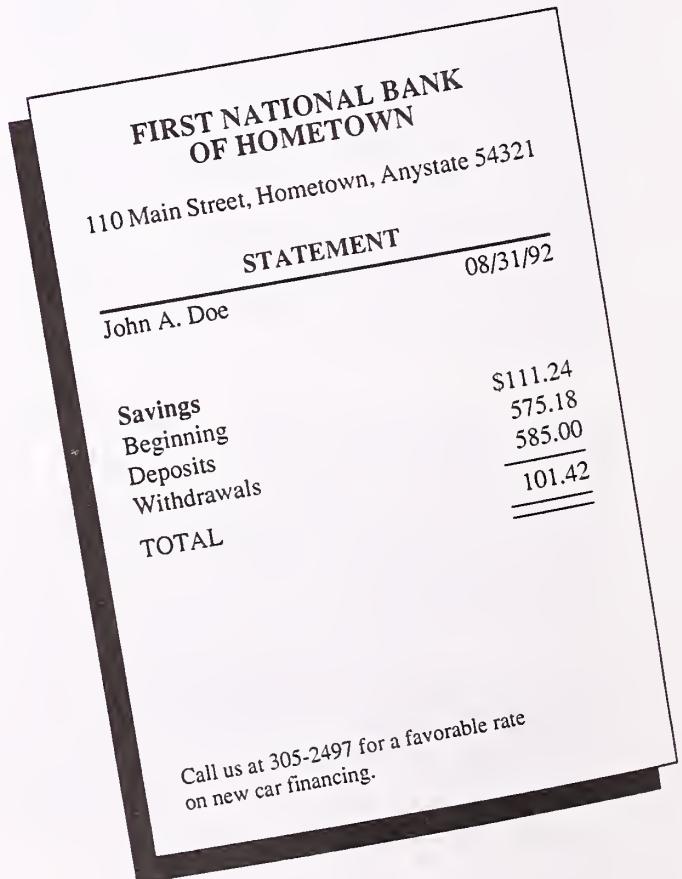
will also ask you for proof of certain information you have given. Ask the worker to explain anything you don't understand. It's important that you understand the rules.

Most interviews are held at the food stamp office. If no one in your household can go to the office for an interview, an adult friend or relative who knows your situation may go to be interviewed for you.

If you are age 60 or older or disabled and you cannot find someone to go to the food stamp office for you, let the office know. A worker will arrange to interview you at home or by telephone. Other people who cannot get to the office and who have no one to go for them may be given a home or telephone interview too.

## Meeting Eligibility Rules and Providing Proof That You Are Eligible

Listed below are some of the basic rules and the kinds of proof you may need during your interview. Your case may be completed faster if you bring the proof with you to the interview.

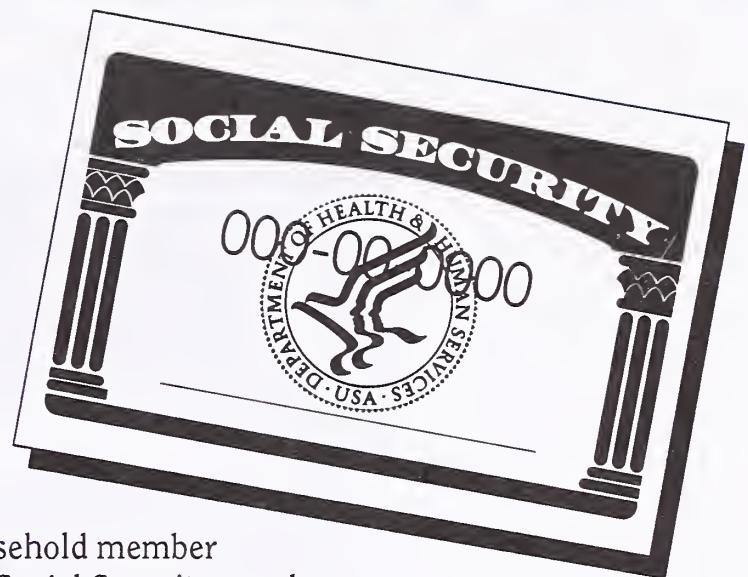


If you have trouble getting papers (documents) or information you need, the worker will help you. If the papers are not easy to get, you may give the name of someone, such as your employer, who can confirm your statements.

**Citizenship and Alien Status:** U.S. citizens, legally permanent aliens, and certain other legal aliens may qualify. If members of your household are not U.S. citizens, you will have to provide proof of their alien status from the Immigration and Naturalization Service. Members whose citizenship is in question cannot get food stamps until proof is obtained that they are U.S. citizens or members of one of the alien groups that can get food stamps.

Even if some members of your household do not meet the citizenship or alien requirements, those who do may be able to get food stamps.

**Social Security Numbers:** You will have to provide a Social Security number for every household member, including children. If any household member does not have a Social Security number, he or she will have to apply for one. If you are otherwise eligible for food stamps, you can get them for a short time while you are waiting for your Social Security number.



**Work Rules:** With certain exceptions, able-bodied people between 16 and 60 years of age must register for work, accept an offer of suitable work, and take part in an employment and training program as required by their State's food stamp agency.



**Students:** Some students enrolled in college and some other educational programs qualify for food stamps. Able-bodied students ages 18 through 49 who are enrolled in college at least half time may be able to get food stamps if otherwise eligible if they:

- get AFDC benefits;
- participate in the JOBS Program under the AFDC Program;
- take part in a State or federally financed work study program;
- work at least 20 hours a week;
- are taking care of a dependent household member under the age of 6;
- are taking care of a dependent household member over the age of 5 but under age 12 and do not have adequate child care to enable them to attend school and work a minimum of 20 hours, or take part in a State or federally-financed work study program; or
- are assigned to or placed in a college or certain other schools through:
  - a program under the Job Training Partnership Act,

- a program under Section 236 of the Trade Act of 1974,
- an employment and training program under the Food Stamp Act, or
- an employment and training program operated by a State or local government.

Also, a single parent enrolled full time in college and taking care of a dependent household member under the age of 12 can get food stamps if otherwise eligible.

**Persons on Strike:** Households with a person who is on strike because of a labor dispute are not eligible unless they were eligible the day before the strike and continue to be eligible at the time of application. Eligible households cannot get more food stamps because the striking member gets less income.

**Resources:** Under food stamp rules, resources—such as bank accounts, cash, real estate, personal property, vehicles, and so forth—are considered in determining whether a household is eligible to get food stamps. Some resources are counted and some are not. The food stamp worker will explain which are counted. All households may have up to \$2,000 worth of countable resources and be eligible. Households may have up to \$3,000 and be eligible if a least one member is age 60 or older.

Some resources that **will not** be counted are:

- your home and surrounding lot,
- household goods and personal belongings, and
- life insurance policies.

Examples of resources that **will** be counted are:

- cash and money in checking and savings accounts;
- stocks and bonds; and
- land and buildings, other than your home and lot, that do not produce income.

(Proof: Bank books, bank statements, and other documents.)

The resources of people who get AFDC, SSI, and, in some locations, general assistance are not counted toward the limit.

Licensed vehicles are handled as follows:

- A vehicle is not counted as a resource if it is:

- used over 50 percent of the time for producing income for the household,
- annually producing income consistent with its fair market value,
- necessary for long-distance travel for work (other than daily commute),
- used as the household's home, or
- necessary to transport a physically disabled household member.

- For the following vehicles, the **fair market value** is determined and any amount **over \$4,500** is counted as a resource:

- one vehicle per household; and
- any vehicle used for employment, training or education to prepare for employment, or to look for employment to meet the food stamp employment and training rules.

- For all other vehicles, the **fair market value over \$4,500 or the equity value, whichever is greater**, is counted as a resource. (Equity value is the market value of the vehicle, less the amount the household owes on it.)

**Income:** Under food stamp rules, almost all types of income are counted. Only households with income at or below certain dollar limits will get food stamps.

(Proof: You must provide proof of the income of all household members. Examples of proof include latest pay stubs or a statement from your employer; and benefit letters from Social Security, Veterans Administration, unemployment compensation, or pensions.)

Households in which all members are getting AFDC or SSI (or, in some locations, general assistance) do not have to meet the income eligibility tests.

**Deductions:** After adding all of your household's countable income, the food stamp worker will subtract certain deductions. The total must fall below a certain dollar limit, depending on your household's size, for your household to get food stamps. The following deductions are allowed for all households:

- a standard deduction;
- a 20-percent deduction from earned income;
- a deduction for the actual costs of dependent care (There is a dollar limit on the amount of the deduction. Dependent care includes care for children and disabled adults if this care is needed so that a household member can work, look for a job, or get training or education leading to a job.); and

- a part of shelter expenses that is more than half of your income (There is a dollar limit on the amount of shelter expenses that may be deducted unless there is an elderly or disabled member. If there is an elderly or disabled member, the dollar limit does not apply.).

If your household has one or more members who are disabled or age 60 or older, you may be able to deduct any medical costs that are over \$35 a month for these members. These costs are deductible only if they are not covered by insurance, a Government program, or some other source.

(Proof: Bills or records of payment for the following:

- dependent-care costs, such as a babysitter, day-care center, or attendant for a disabled adult;
- rent or mortgage;
- insurance on the structure (but not the contents) of a home;
- telephone, electricity, gas, oil, water, sewerage, garbage collection, and installation costs for utilities; and
- medical expenses and proof of any reimbursement, such as an insurance policy or statement from an insurance company or agency paying these bills.)

## Finding Out Whether You Qualify

After your interview, the food stamp office will send you a notice.

If you do not qualify for food stamps, the notice will explain why.

If you do qualify, the notice will explain how many food stamps you will get. It will also tell you how many months you can get food stamps before you must reapply.

If you think your application has been wrongly denied or that you have not gotten the correct amount of food stamps, you should tell the office. If they do not agree, you must ask them to have your case reviewed by a fair hearing official. For more information about fair hearings, see the section entitled Your Rights on page 10.

## Receiving Your Food Stamps

If the office finds that you are eligible, you will get your food stamps no later than 30 days from the date you first applied, unless you qualify for faster service. If you have no income for the month (or very little income) and you need help right away, you may qualify for 5-day service.



Food stamps are issued to households in several different ways. The food stamp worker will explain the ways your local office uses. Eligible households will be given an identification card that they must show when picking up their food stamps. In some areas, this will be a photo ID.

If you are told to pick up your food stamps, but you can't, tell the food stamp worker. You may name someone else to pick them up for you.

## Spending Your Food Stamps

You can spend food stamps like cash at most stores that sell food. The cashier may ask you to show your food stamp ID.

Food stamps can only be used for food and for plants and seeds to grow food for your household to eat.

Sales tax cannot be charged on items bought with food stamps.



Food stamps **cannot** be used to buy:

- alcoholic beverages;
- tobacco or cigarettes;
- household supplies, soaps, and paper products;
- medicines or vitamins;
- any other nonfood items;
- food that will be eaten in the store;
- hot foods that are ready to eat, such as barbecued chicken; or
- pet foods.

Food stamps come in booklets. If your food stamps get loose from the booklet cover, keep the cover. Stores cannot accept any food stamps without a booklet cover, except for the \$1 kind.

If the cashier owes you change from a food stamp purchase, up to 99 cents of it can be in coins. Change in even dollar amounts will be given to you in food stamps.

## Food Stamp Program:

### Official Food List

To be posted in retail food stores.

- Retailers shall not engage in a series of transactions in order to provide the same food stamp customer an amount of cash change greater than the maximum 99 cents cash change allowed in one transaction.
- Retailers shall not collect State or local sales taxes on purchases made with food stamps.

To obtain information about the Food Stamp Program or to report program violations, call or write:

The Food Stamp Program is available to all eligible persons regardless of race, color, creed, sex, national origin, age, political beliefs, or handicap.

United States Department of Agriculture  
Food and Nutrition Service  
FNS-110  
Revised October 1987

### Food Stamps Can Buy:

- Foods for human consumption
- Seeds and plants which produce food for consumption by food stamp households

### Food Stamps Cannot Buy:

- Any nonfood items, such as
  - pet foods
  - soaps, paper products, and household supplies
  - grooming items and cosmetics
- Alcoholic beverages and tobacco
- Vitamins and medicines
- Any food that will be eaten in the store
- Hot foods that are ready to eat
- Any food marketed to be heated in the store



## Reporting Changes in Your Circumstances

If you are eligible for food stamps, you will be told what events to report and when to report them.

You must report changes in your situation when they happen. You may report changes by calling the food stamp office. However, it is better to write down the change and mail it to the office.

**IT IS EXTREMELY IMPORTANT THAT YOU REPORT CHANGES, SO THAT YOUR HOUSEHOLD GETS THE RIGHT AMOUNT OF FOOD STAMPS. IF YOU GET ANY EXTRA FOOD STAMPS BECAUSE YOU HAVE NOT REPORTED A CHANGE, YOU WILL HAVE TO PAY BACK THE VALUE OF THE EXTRA FOOD STAMPS.**

**U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE - Food and Nutrition Service  
CHANGE REPORT FORM**

FORM APPROVED OMB NO. #0584-0064  
CASE NUMBER \_\_\_\_\_  
DATE \_\_\_\_\_

NAME \_\_\_\_\_  
ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_  
DEAR: \_\_\_\_\_

**YOU ARE REQUIRED TO REPORT ANY OF THE FOLLOWING CHANGES IN YOUR HOUSEHOLD CIRCUMSTANCES:**

- Changes in your total household income when it goes up or down by more than \$25 a month. You don't have to report changes in your AFDC check.
- Changes in any source of income.
- A car, or other licensed vehicle, if anyone in your household gets one.
- Increases in your household's savings if the total cash and savings of all household members now amounts to \$2,000 or more.
- Changes in the number of people in your household.
- Your new address if you move.
- Your new utility, rent or mortgage costs if you move.
- When total medical expenses go up or down by more than \$25 a month for household members age 60 or over or a disabled spouse or disabled child of a deceased veteran or members who receive Supplemental Security (SSI) benefits, Social Security Disability payments, State general assistance disability benefits, veterans disability benefits, government disability retirement benefits or Railroad Retirement disability benefits.

You must report these changes within 10 days of the time you learn of them. This will help make sure you get the correct amount of food stamps.

You can also use this form to report changes in the cost of caring for children or disabled adults or changes in shelter costs even if you have not moved. If these expenses go up or down you may be eligible for more or less food stamps.

IF YOU PURPOSELY HOLD BACK INFORMATION ABOUT CHANGES IN YOUR HOUSEHOLD, YOU WILL OWE US THE VALUE OF ANY EXTRA FOOD STAMPS YOU RECEIVE AS A RESULT. YOU MAY ALSO BE BARRED FROM THE FOOD STAMP PROGRAM FOR 6 MONTHS, 12 MONTHS OR PERMANENTLY, AND BE FINED, IMPRISONED, OR BOTH.

If for some reason you can't mail this form, you can report the changes by calling us at \_\_\_\_\_.

Sincerely,

RECEIVED \_\_\_\_\_  
AFDC CHECK, OF INCOME E THE STRIKE \_\_\_\_\_  
VETERANS BENEFITS OR BY MORE \_\_\_\_\_  
MORTGAGE \_\_\_\_\_  
ZIP CODE \_\_\_\_\_  
YOU CAN BE REACHED \_\_\_\_\_  
MORTGAGE \_\_\_\_\_  
ITEMS FOR YOUR HOUSEHOLD, FOOD STAMPS YOU'RE NOT ELIGIBLE FOR, SUCH AS \_\_\_\_\_  
S OR AUTHORIZATION \_\_\_\_\_  
FEDERAL, STATE AND ORGANIZATIONS TO \_\_\_\_\_  
Page 2  
Page 4

FORM FNS-387 (4-89) Previous editions are obsolete

## Your Rights

You have the right to:

- get an application the same day you ask for it;
- have your application accepted immediately;
- have an adult who knows your situation apply for you if you cannot get to the food stamp office;
- have a home visit or a telephone interview if you are 60 or older or are disabled and you cannot find someone to go to the food stamp office for you;

- get your food stamps within 30 days after you apply, if you do qualify for them;
- get food stamps within 5 days if you are in immediate need and qualify for faster service;
- not be discriminated against because you are elderly or because of sex, race, color, disability, religious creed, national origin, or political beliefs;
- be told in advance if the food stamp office is going to reduce or end your benefits because of a change in your situation that you did not report in writing;
- look at your own case file and a copy of the Food Stamp Program rules; and
- have a fair hearing if you don't think the rules were applied correctly in your case. At a fair hearing, you may explain to a hearing official why you don't agree with what the food stamp office has done.

## FOOD STAMP RIGHTS

You have the right to:

- Receive an application when you ask for it.
- Turn in your application the same day you receive it.
- Receive your food stamps (or be notified that you are not eligible for the program) within 30 days after you turn in your application.
- Receive food stamps within a few days if you are eligible and have little or no money.
- Have a fair hearing if you disagree with any action taken on your case.



If you believe that you or any group of individuals have been discriminated against by the Food Stamp Program because of age, sex, color, race, disability, religious creed, national origin or political beliefs, write immediately to the Administrator, Food and Nutrition Service, 3101 Park Center Drive, Alexandria, Virginia 22302.

U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service, FNS-183, Issued December 1978

Slightly Revised September 1992

You can ask the food stamp office for a fair hearing in writing, in person, or over the phone. The office will give you information about the hearing rules in your State.

You can ask a friend or relative or anyone else to help you prepare for the hearing and go to the hearing with you.

In some cases, you can continue to get your food stamps without a change while you are waiting for the hearing decision.

If the hearing official decides you are right, you will continue to get or begin to get the correct amount of food stamps. If the official decides

the food stamp office is right, you will be asked to repay the value of any food stamps you did not have a right to get.

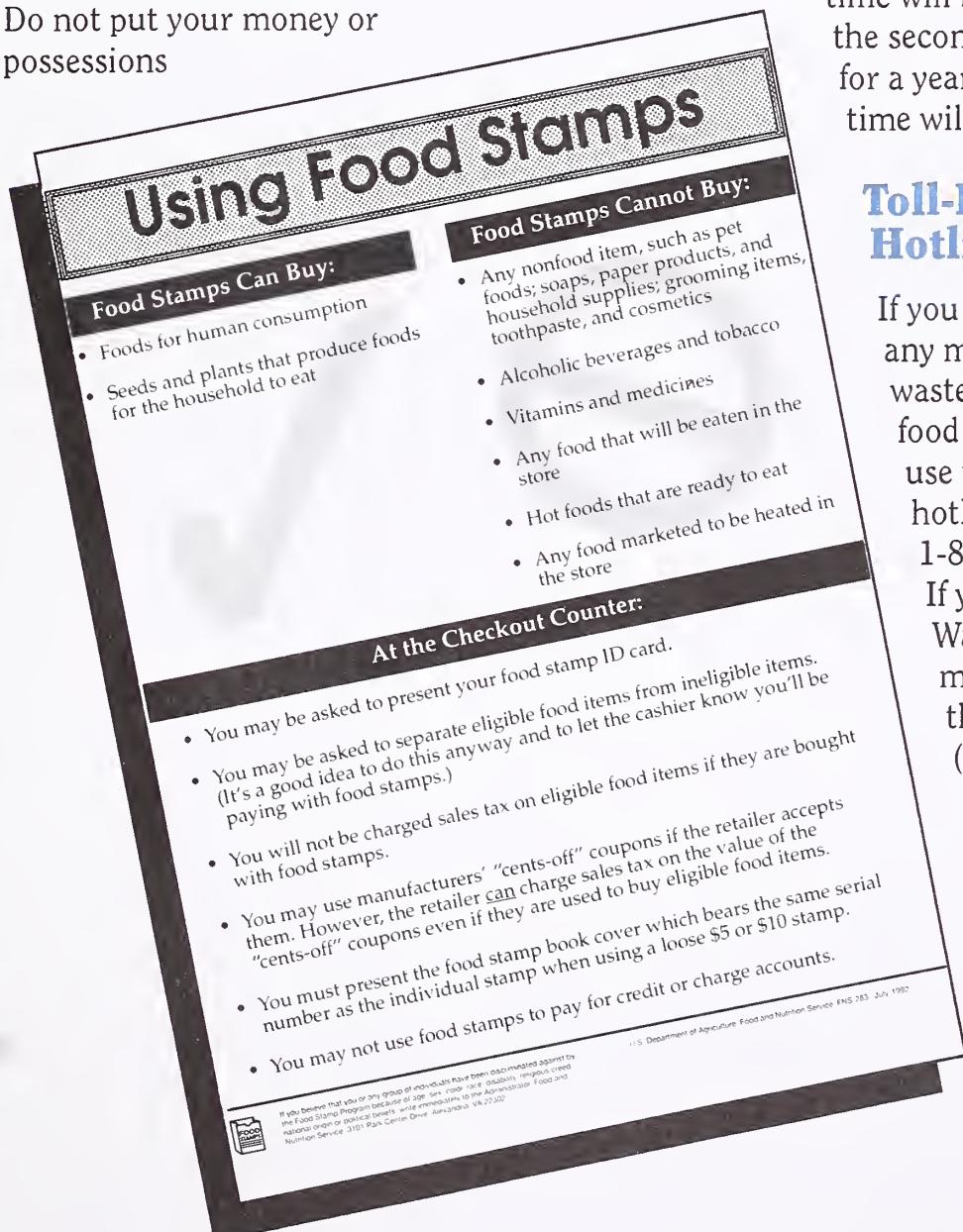
## Your Responsibilities

- When you apply for food stamps, answer all questions completely and honestly. Sign your name to certify, under penalty of perjury, that all your answers are true.
- Provide proof that you are eligible.
- Promptly report certain household circumstances (and changes in them) to the food stamp office.
- Do not put your money or possessions

in someone else's name in order to be able to get food stamps.

- Do not make changes on any food stamp cards or documents.
- Do not sell, trade, or give away your food stamps, or any food stamp cards or documents.
- Use food stamps only to buy eligible items.

PEOPLE WHO BREAK FOOD STAMP RULES MAY BE DISQUALIFIED FROM THE PROGRAM, FINED, IMPRISONED, OR ALL THREE. If disqualified, the first time will be for 6 months; the second time will be for a year; and the third time will be permanent.



## Toll-Free Hotline

If you wish to report any misuse, fraud, waste, or abuse of food stamps, you can use this toll-free hotline number: 1-800-424-9121. If you are in the Washington, DC, metropolitan area, the number is (202) 690-1622.

